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Theatre Summaries

Chicano Theatre Summary

Chicano theatre incorporates the majority of of Spanish speaking theatre in the United

States. It dates back all the way to the arrival of of Spanish conquerers in the 16th century. During the 19th century, Los Angeles and San Francisco were both major centers of Hispanic theatre activity. As railroads became more prominent and linked more cities to one another, a strong sense of Hispanic seriate and traditions began to travel to and from Mexico City. In the 1920’s, Chicano theatre flourished from Los Angeles all the way to Chicago. The productions addressed serious issues amongst Chicano communities such as adapting to a predominantly Anglo culture. During the Great Depression and World War II, Chicano theatre drastically declined but was not lost completely. In the summer of 1965, Chicano theatre became prominent once again as Luis Valdez, commonly referred to as the father of the new direction in Chicano theatre, came in to the light. He created pieces called actos that dramatized the spirit of Chicano culture. He also established El Teatro Campesino. This group acted as a model for other Chicano theatre groups across the U.S. One of Valdez’s more popular plays, Zoot Suit, was based on a racial violence episode in 1978 in Los Angeles.

Cuban-American Theatre Summary

The origins of Cuban-American Theatre in the U.S. starts toward the final decade of the 19th century when melodramas and Cuban blackface farces were staged by Cuban immigrants in New York City and Ybor City-Tampa. Cuban melodramas and lyric theatre became a staple for performances in the Hispanic community. Before World War II, obra bufa cubana, or Cuban blackface farce, was a very popular genre in Hispanic theatres. The hispanic theatre culture greatly developed in Ybor City-Tampa during the late 19th century and early 20th century. In 1959, the Cuban Revolution also sparked an increase in Cuban-American Theatre, particularly in Miami and New York. More recent playwrights tend to comprise their plays in English as well as Spanish and deal with acculturation, bilingualism, culture conflict, and the generational gap between immigrant parents and U.S. raised children.

Hispanic Theatre Summary

Although the U.S. is home to a fast growing Spanish-speaking community, hispanic theatre typically derives from Mexico, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. The first recorded performance of hispanic theatre was in a Spanish mission near Miami in 1567. This was when the Spanish settlers and soldiers utilized the celebration of St. John the Baptist to perform a religious play to catechize the local Indian population. The performances were often to reflect the mission of the Hispanic conquest that often pushed to bring Christianity to the native populations. Documentation of hispanic performances are fairly scarce. The theaters are typically divided into three movement: Chicano theatre, Cuban-American theatre, and Nuyorican theatre.

Puerto Rican Theatre Summary

Puerto Rican Theatre emerged in the United States as a byproduct of the oppressive social conditions that many Puerto Ricans were forced to live in in urban communities of the Northeast, specifically around New York City. Puerto Rican theatre has been described as “perishable” which means a theatre that comes to life in the streets, in gymnasiums, in community centers, and in city parks and plazas. The main message of the performances are that Puerto Ricans have a rich cultural heritage and language that life on the mainland can not erase. Even though the U.S. and Puerto Rico have a political relationship, most Americans do not know a lot about the political status, history and culture of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico’s theatre tradition extends all the way to the early Spanish settlement of the island. The theatrical performances were initially created by the church to promote the spread of Catholicism across the island. In the second half of the 19th century, theatre did not flourish due to control of theatrical production by Spanish companies. After U.S. troops arrived to the island, optimism emerged as well as a few new plays. The year of 1940-1980 were crucial to the development of Puerto Rican theatre. For example, in the 1960s the Black arts movement was very popular which dealt with social and political issues.